

PART 2060 - PERFORMANCE RATINGS

Subpart A - Rural Development Performance Appraisal

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PART 2060 - PERFORMANCE RATINGS

Subpart A - Rural Development Performance Appraisal

§ 2060.1 Purpose.

The purpose of performance management is to improve individual and organizational performance, program effectiveness, and accountability by focusing on results, service quality, and customer satisfaction, and by aligning standards and elements with organizational goals and strategic plans.

Effective October 1, 2005, this Instruction is to be used for all non-bargaining unit employees in Rural Development and bargaining unit employees once all labor management obligations have been fulfilled. Obligations under 5 U.S.C. Chapter 71 Labor-management Relations could require further negotiation or consultation with recognized labor organizations concerning appropriate aspects of this performance appraisal system. The number of summary levels at which performance can be evaluated is non-negotiable.

§ 2060.2 Legal Authorities.

- (a) USDA Performance Management System established on June 12, 1996
- (b) 5 U.S.C. Chapter 43
- (c) 5 CFR part 430
- (d) 5 CFR part 432

§ 2060.3 Definitions.

The following general definitions are applicable to the terms used in this subpart:

- (a) Absolute Standard. A performance standard that allows no margin of error. An absolute standard is acceptable only in very limited circumstances where failure to perform under a critical element could result in loss of life, injury, breach of national security, or great monetary loss.

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(b) Appraisal. The act or process of reviewing and evaluating the performance of an employee against the described performance plan/standard, and may consist of oral and written progress reviews.

(c) Appraisal Period. The period of time during which an employee's performance will be reviewed and a rating of record will be prepared. The appraisal period generally begins on October 1 of each year and ends on September 30 of the following year, unless there is a change through labor-management negotiations.

(d) Appraisal Unit. The unit of measure used to establish the relative weighted value of critical and non-critical elements.

(e) Backwards Performance Standard. A backwards performance standard has a tendency to describe the work that does not get done instead of what must be done to meet the fully successful level of the performance standard.

(f) Collateral Duties. Collateral assignments are official duties and responsibilities assigned to an employee in addition to the primary duties and responsibilities of the position the employee occupies.

(g) Competencies. An underlying characteristic of an employee (i.e., motive, trait, skill, aspect of one's self-image, social role or a body of knowledge) which results in effective and/or performance above "Fully Successful".

(h) Critical Element. A component of a position consisting of one or more duties and responsibilities on which the employee is rated and which contributes toward accomplishing the goals and objectives of the organization. This work assignment or responsibility is of such importance that performance at the "Does Not Meet Fully Successful" level on the element would result in unacceptable performance in the position overall.

(i) Customers. Internal co-workers, external peers, and/or members of the public who receive various services and/or products from Rural Development employees.

(j) Decision Table. A matrix used for deriving a rating from appraisal of individual elements. See Exhibit C.

## § 2060.3 (Con.)

(k) Equal Opportunity/Civil Rights (EO/CR). The employee rights that prohibit discrimination in all programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status.

(l) Employee Performance File (EPF). The employee's performance file will contain ratings of record and the performance plans on which the ratings are based for the most recent 4 years, award documentation, and award Notification of Personnel Actions.

(m) Element Rating/Appraisal. The level of performance on a critical or non-critical element, which is determined by comparing accomplishments to the performance standard. Element rating levels are: "Exceeds Fully Successful", "Fully Successful", and "Does Not Meet Fully Successful" level.

(n) Interim Rating. Appraisals done at any other time besides the end of the appraisal period, such as change in position, change in supervisor, conclusion of a detail or a temporary promotion.

(o) Minimum Appraisal Period. The 90-calendar day period of time during which an employee must have operated under a performance plan and for which the employee may receive a performance rating.

(p) Non-Critical Element. A component of an employee's position, which does not meet the definition of a critical element, but is of sufficient importance to warrant written appraisal and the assignment of an element rating.

(q) Opportunity to Improve (OTI) (Performance Improvement Plan [PIP]). A written plan established at any time during the appraisal period when it is determined by the Rating Official that an employee is performing at the "Does Not Meet Fully Successful" level in any critical element(s). It outlines the steps the employee should take to improve performance to an acceptable level and the length of time for which it is in effect. It is contained in RD Form 2060-2, "Opportunity to Improve," or it may also be done in the form of a memorandum.

(r) Performance. An employee's accomplishment of assigned work or duties and responsibilities as specified in the critical and non-critical elements of the employee's position.

(s) Performance Management System. The total process of integrating performance, pay, and incentive systems with basic management functions for the purpose of improving individual and organizational effectiveness in the accomplishment of Rural Development's mission and goals. Basic to the foundation of performance management is the performance appraisal process.

(t) Performance Standard. A statement of the expectations or requirements established by management for a critical or non-critical element at a "Meets Fully Successful" or equivalent level for each element which may also be defined at other levels. A performance standard may include, but is not limited to, factors such as quality, quantity, cost-efficiency, timeliness, and manner of performance.

(u) Performance Plan. The written document that identifies the employee's critical and non-critical elements and performance standards by which the employee will be rated. It is contained on Forms AD-435 A/B, "Performance Plan, Progress Review, and Appraisal Worksheet."

(v) Progress Review. A joint discussion between the Rating Official and the employee regarding the employee's progress toward achieving performance standards. It does not involve the issuance of a rating of record.

(w) Rating of Record. The final summary rating normally issued at the end of the appraisal period which becomes a part of the Employee's Performance File (EPF) maintained in the Servicing Human Resource Office (SHRO). It consists of the Forms AD-435 & 435A/B and any additional documentation.

(x) Rating Official. An employee's first line supervisor or other person designated with responsibility for establishing performance plans, conducting progress reviews, and issuing final ratings of record.

(y) Reviewing Official. The individual responsible for reviewing and concurring with all ratings of record and resolving differences of opinion between rating officials and employees.

## § 2060.3 (Con.)

(z) Reduction-in-Force (RIF). Procedure used to determine how employees will compete to stay in an organization when employment reductions are necessary. The RIF process emphasizes the right of some employees to remain employed when job cuts are made. The regulatory requirements governing RIF regulations must consider four factors in releasing employees: (1) tenure of employment (e.g., type of appointment); (2) veterans preference; (3) length of service; and (4) performance ratings.

(aa) Team. A cooperative unit designed to accomplish a specified mission, such as those typically found in local offices, within organizational structures, assigned to specific tasks or projects, etc. Team membership is not necessarily limited to a specific agency or functional unit. Only "individual" contributions to a team can be rated as critical. Overall team performance must be non-critical.

(bb) Summary Level. The written rating of overall performance, the appraisal of each critical and non-critical element, and the assignment of a summary rating level by application of the decision table/matrix. Summary rating levels are "Outstanding," "Superior," "Fully Successful," "Marginal," and "Unacceptable."

(cc) Unacceptable Performance. Performance of an employee, which fails to meet established "Meets Fully Successful" performance standards in one or more critical elements of the employee's position.

§ 2060.4 Forms and Records.

(a) Appraisal Forms. Performance plans containing progress reviews and the performance elements and standards by which those elements will be evaluated must be recorded on Forms AD 435 A/B, and copies provided to the employee. The supervisor will retain the original. Performance ratings of record will be documented on Form AD 435, "Performance Appraisal" and will also consist of Forms AD 435 A's/B's and any other supporting documentation.

(b) Opportunity to Improve (OTI). An OTI is developed and documented on RD Form 2060-2, or it may be written in the form of a memorandum. It is used to assist employees in improving performance to the Fully Successful level.



(c) Records. In addition to the procedures set forth in 5 CFR part 293 Subpart D that deals with the regulations for establishment, content, disposition, and retention of records, the following procedures govern the establishment and maintenance of performance records.

(1) All records must meet the requirements of 5 CFR part 297, which deals with "Privacy Procedures for Personnel Records," as well as any Departmental provisions of the Privacy Act and Freedom of Information Act.

(2) Periods for maintaining ratings of record are:

(i) Non Senior Executive Service (SES) employees. Non SES employee ratings of record and the performance plans on which the ratings are based must be filed in the EPF for the most recent 4 years. Ratings older than 4 years are not retained in the EPF.

(ii) SES employees. SES employees are not covered by this performance management system, however, ratings of record and the performance plans on which the ratings are based must be filed in the EPF for the most recent 5 years. Ratings older than 5 years are not retained in the EPF.

(3) When the EPF of an employee is sent to another SHRO, to another agency or department, or to the National Personnel Records Center, the "losing" SHRO shall include in the EPF the three most recent ratings of record received during the preceding 4-year period for non-SES employees, and the preceding 5 year prior for SES employees. Also, the "losing" office will purge from the EPF, all ratings of record and performance plans that are more than 4 years old for non-SES employees, or 5 years old for SES employees.

#### 2060.5 Responsibilities.

The following guidelines are applicable to the Under Secretary, Agency Administrators, Human Resources Offices, reviewing officials, rating officials, and employees:

(a) Under Secretary and Agency Administrators. The Under Secretary and Agency Administrators are responsible for:

§ 2060.5(a) (Con.)

(1) Monitoring program compliance with applicable laws and regulations, Departmental policies, and collective bargaining agreements.

(2) Ensuring program compliance with policy and program direction and administration.

(3) Communicating the Agency mission, strategic goals and objectives to all levels within their operating administration.

(b) Servicing Human Resources Office (SHRO). The SHRO is responsible for:

(1) Providing technical and operational support and advice to the rating and reviewing officials to help them administer the performance management program in a manner consistent with applicable laws, rules, and regulations.

(2) Ensuring that performance plans and ratings of record are maintained in the SHRO in accordance with the requirement of 5 CFR parts 293 and 297.

(3) Providing training on the performance management program for rating and reviewing officials responsibilities.

(4) Assisting in resolving concerns at the lowest possible level.

(c) Reviewing Officials. Reviewing Officials are responsible for:

(1) Reviewing and concurring with all ratings of record.

(2) Resolving differences between employees and rating officials concerning ratings and adjusting ratings when necessary.

(3) Assisting in resolving concerns at the lowest possible level.

(4) Ensuring that performance standards and elements adequately reflect appropriate levels of quality and difficulty of performance.

(5) Making certain all performance ratings are accurate, consistent, and equitable throughout the organization.

(d) Rating Officials. Rating Officials are responsible for:

- (1) Informing the employee of the overall mission, objectives, goals, plans, and activities of the Agency and work unit and how their individual performance plan aligns with the organizational goals.
- (2) Providing feedback to the employee through ongoing communication throughout the appraisal period and actively listening and considering feedback from the employee and customers.
- (3) Providing the employee the opportunity to participate in the development of performance plans.
- (4) Providing the employee with written performance plans which identify the critical and non-critical elements related to their specific duties, responsibilities, and expected levels of performance.
- (5) Conducting and documenting at least one formal progress review around the midpoint of the appraisal period and additional reviews as necessary.
- (6) Completing ratings of record and such other performance ratings, as may be necessary, which include evaluating and documenting the employee's actual accomplishments and determining summary rating levels.
- (7) Recommending personnel actions and/or training, as necessary, based on the employee's level of performance in relation to the performance standards and elements.
- (8) Rewarding employees fairly and appropriately, by utilizing the awards and recognition program to recognize the employee's performance and achievements.
- (9) Addressing concerns at the lowest possible level.

(e) Employees. Employees are responsible for:

- (1) Communicating with the supervisor throughout the appraisal period.

§ 2060.5(e) (Con.)

- (2) Participating in the development of performance plans and measurable performance standards.
- (3) Assuring that they have a clear understanding of their rating official's expectations and requesting clarification when necessary.
- (4) Assisting in identifying training needs to enhance performance.
- (5) Managing performance to achieve expectations and bringing to the rating official's attention, circumstances that may affect achievement of standards.
- (6) Participating in discussions of individual performance.
- (7) Actively listening and considering feedback from the rating and/or reviewing officials.
- (8) Providing input on accomplishments.
- (9) Improving those aspects of performance identified as needing improvement.

§ 2060.6 Coverage. Coverage of this program is clarified as follows:

- (a) Rural Development employees. All Rural Development employees who are reasonably expected to be employed for 90 days or more.
- (b) Schedule C employees. Schedule C employees are covered, but are not afforded any rights as established by 5 U.S.C. 4303. Inclusion of managers, supervisors, and employees occupying Schedule C positions do not extend to those employees any rights established under 5 U.S.C. Chapter 43.
- (c) Excluded employees. Excluded from coverage are those employees expected to be employed for less than 90 days; non-Federal employees; those persons employed in the Senior Executive Service and;
  - (1) Those employees excluded by 5 U.S.C. 4301 (2);

(2) Positions in the excepted service for which employment is not reasonably expected to exceed 120 calendar days in a consecutive 12 month period;

(3) Employees in the following positions when filled by appointment limited to 1 year or less, or when employees are serving on intermittent tours of duty:

(i) Positions filled under 5 CFR part 213.3102(i) when occupied by employees in remote/isolated locations where examination is impractical.

(ii) Positions filled under 5 CFR part 213.3102(k) when occupied by employees to whom no compensation is paid.

(iii) Positions filled under 5 CFR part 213.3102(l) when occupied by scientific, professional, or technical experts for consultation purposes.

(iv) Positions filled under 5 CFR part 213.3102(o) when occupied by faculty members.

(4) The following positions when filled by individuals who are expected to work under these appointments;

(i) Positions filled under 5 CFR part 213.3202(a) when occupied by students appointed under the Student Educational Employment Program - Student Temporary Employment Program.

(ii) Positions filled under 5 CFR part 213.3202(b) when occupied by students appointed under the Student Educational Employment Program - Student Career Experience Program.

(5) Although the above groups of employees are exempt from the requirements of this Instruction, that exemption does not prohibit supervisors from maintaining records of work, nor does it prevent supervisors from recommending or taking administrative action involving such personnel.

§ 2060.7 Policy.

It is Rural Development's policy that, within the framework provided by this program, individual and organizational goals will be communicated to employees; individual responsibility for accomplishing team and organizational goals will be identified; employees will be provided feedback regarding performance; performance will be evaluated and improved; and performance results will be used as a basis for appropriate personnel actions.

(a) Accountability. All participants in this process should expect to be held accountable for accomplishment of their performance management responsibilities as identified in this Instruction.

(b) Communication. Communication between the rating official and the employee is essential throughout this process.

(1) The rating official and employee should work together to jointly clarify how performance plans apply within the work environment so that there is a common understanding about the expectations for performance.

(2) There should be a discussion of the goals of the individual work unit and the employee's involvement/contribution to unit goals for the upcoming year.

(3) The rating official is ultimately responsible for setting performance elements and standards.

(c) Organizational Goals. Rural Development's goal is to align mission goals with organization objectives, which are an integral part of the strategic plan, performance plan, and budget plan. The accomplishment of organizational and individual goals is the responsibility of all employees. The first step in developing an employee's performance plan is to determine which organizational goal(s) his or her work unit supports or affects. The next step is to determine the work unit's products or services that support organizational goal achievement. The employee can be held responsible for those products or services.

(1) Performance plans for supervisors and managers must include the performance elements and standards cascaded from the SES performance evaluation factors.

(2) Performance plans for non-supervisory employees must include the performance elements and standards cascaded from the supervisors and managers' performance elements and standards.

§ 2060.8 Performance Planning.

Performance planning is the process of developing performance plans that align individual performance with organizational goals. Focus must be placed on accomplishments (i.e., end results) rather than on activities. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) developed an eight-step method to assist organizations in developing performance plans with this emphasis. Please reference attached Exhibit A, "Quick Reference for Developing Employee Performance Plans that Link to Organizational Goals," which outlines this process. This reference may be consulted when developing performance plans.

(a) Preparation and communication of performance plans.

(1) Individual performance plans will be established and communicated in writing within 30 days of the beginning of each appraisal period, or within 30 days of an employee's assignment to a position (e.g., promotion, reassignment, appointment).

(2) Performance plans shall be reestablished or revised each time a work assignment changes significantly, whether or not the work assignment requires a personnel action. Employees must be informed and given the opportunity to discuss any revisions and changes made to their written performance plans to assure individual and organizational goals will be met.

(3) Individual performance plans will be established and communicated in writing to the employee within 30 days of an employee's assignment to a position (e.g., promotion, reassignment, appointment).

(4) All performance plans and changes must be submitted to the reviewing official for approval prior to signing by the employee. Reviews of performance plans are to ensure appropriate levels of quality and difficulty of performance standards are addressed within each employee's plan. In most cases the reviewing official is the second-level supervisor.

§ 2060.8(a)(4) (Con.)

State Directors are authorized to serve as the reviewing official for any field position reporting directly to them except Program Directors and Area Directors. Performance plans for Program Directors and Area Directors will be sent to the National Office for review. The reviewing official for Area Directors is the Chief of Staff; and for Program Directors, the Associate Administrator for the appropriate program area.

(b) Employee participation in establishing performance plans.

Supervisors and managers have a major responsibility to ensure consistency, objectivity, and equity in the development of performance elements and standards and the subsequent appraisal of performance against those standards. Elements and standards must be based on the requirements of the employee's position. Communication between the supervisor and the employee is essential in this process. The identification of performance elements and the establishment of performance standards require joint participation of the supervisor and the employee. By participating, employees get a better understanding of what is required and what role their position plays in the activity of the organization. Joint participation may be accomplished by means including, but not limited to, the following:

- (1) Employee and supervisor discuss and develop performance plan together.
- (2) Employee provides supervisor a draft performance plan.
- (3) Employee comments on draft performance plan prepared by the supervisor; or
- (4) Employees who occupy similar positions prepare performance plan(s) with supervisor's approval.

Final authority for establishing elements and standards rests with supervisory officials.



(c) Performance elements.

(1) Method of identifying performance elements. Performance elements are established using position descriptions, work plans, Rural Development instructions, project proposals, goals, targets, job analyses, equal employment opportunity action plans, individual development plans, and any other source that assigns or fixes responsibility for accomplishment of duties. Accomplishment of organizational objectives should be included in performance plans by incorporating objectives; goals; program plans; or workplans, or by other means that account for program results.

(2) Number of elements. A minimum of three elements must be used (at least one of which must be critical and one of which must be non-critical), but normally no more than ten elements will be used.

(3) Use of Sub-elements. Sub-elements may not be used. This restriction does not preclude further specification of work within an element as long as only one rating level is assigned for the element.

(4) Identification of elements. Elements identified under a performance plan for a position should usually be reflected in an accurately described position and should generally encompass the major duties and responsibilities of the position.

(i) The elements should be based on organizational goals, strategic plans, position descriptions, and internal and external customer needs.

(ii) Whenever possible, similar positions should have like standards.

(5) Critical elements. Critical elements are work assignments or responsibilities of such importance that "Does Not Meet Fully Successful" performance in the element would result in a determination that the employees overall performance is "Unacceptable".

(i) Critical elements must be included in the performance workplan, but all elements may not be critical elements. At least one non-critical element must be used. Critical elements are weighted with a two.

§ 2060.8(c)(5) (Con.)

(ii) Critical elements must be based solely on the individual performance of the employee. For example, only individual contributions to a team can be rated as critical.

(iii) Sources of feedback on employee performance related to a critical element must be sustained and documented at the time of rating.

(6) Non-critical elements. Non-critical elements should directly relate back to the employees duties but not necessarily a major duty. Non-critical elements are weighted with a one.

(7) Mandatory critical elements. Mandatory critical elements have been established and are available for use in developing performance plans. Below are some examples of mandatory critical elements, Exhibit B contains the full list.

(i) A mandatory management control statement must be incorporated for all supervisors and managers.

(ii) A mandatory EO/CR element is required as a stand-alone element for all supervisors and managers.

(iii) Employees who are not supervisors or managers must also have an EO/CR standard.

(iv) A mandatory Resources Management element is required as a stand-alone element for all managers and supervisors GS-13 and above.

See Exhibit B for additional Mandatory Critical Elements.

(8) Standardized generic performance elements. Standardized generic performance elements have been established and are available for use in developing performance plans. See Exhibit B.

(i) Timeframes and appropriate procedures, when referenced in elements, are derived directly from applicable regulatory guidelines, procedural guides, and/or agency program instructions, etc.

(ii) Timeframes, quantity, quality, cost-effectiveness, or manner of performance, must be included with applicable elements when not sufficiently specific in agency regulations and guidelines.

It is recommended that all generic elements be tailored to the position being evaluated.

(d) Performance standards. Performance standards will be written to describe the "Meets Fully Successful" or equivalent level of performance for each element which may also be defined at other levels. Fully successful performance is performance of an acceptable quality, wherein the employee produces the expected quantity and quality of work and meets deadlines or schedules for completion of work. The absence of a written standard at the "Exceeds Fully Successful" level or the "Does Not Meet Fully Successful" level does not preclude the assignment of a rating at those levels.

(e) Documentation. All performance elements and standards must be described in writing and provided to the employee within 30 days of the beginning of the appraisal cycle, or being assigned to a position. Performance plans will be documented on Forms AD-435A/B, and include the designation of critical and non-critical elements. Supervisors should retain the original for use at the end of the appraisal period, and employees should be provided a copy.

#### § 2060.9 Monitoring and Appraising Performance.

The monitoring process includes conducting at least one formal progress review during each appraisal period at approximately mid-way through the rating cycle. While only one progress review is required, rating officials are encouraged to frequently provide feedback to the employees during the rating cycle.

(a) Supervisory responsibilities. Supervisors are responsible for monitoring employee performance against performance standards throughout the rating period and should provide on-going feedback to the employee about the level and quality of performance. It does not necessarily involve the issuance of a rating of record.

(b) Normal performance period. The normal performance appraisal period is from October 1 through September 30 of each year, unless changed through labor negotiations. Ratings of record will normally be completed within 30 days of the end of the appraisal period.

(1) Ratings may only be based on actual employee accomplishments. Presumptive ratings of record are prohibited. If a rating is needed for a specific purpose such as within-grade increase, quality step increase, or a reduction-in-force, and there is no current rating of record, a rating will be made in accordance with the instructions governing the action which requires the rating. Instructions will be provided at that time.

(2) A formal appraisal (interim or rating of record) may not be given unless elements and standards were established and communicated to the employee and the employee has served under those elements and standards for a minimum of 90 days.

(c) Documentation of accomplishments. At the end of the appraisal period, the supervisor with administrative responsibility for the employee, documents accomplishments on Forms AD-435A/B or on bond paper attached to Forms AD-435A/B. Documentation is required for any element appraised at "Does Not Meet Fully Successful" or "Exceeds Fully Successful." This meets the requirement for documentation for a summary rating of "Outstanding." The documentation must show clearly and specifically how the employee's performance exceeded or failed to meet the fully successful standard. If performance is at the "Meets Fully Successful" level, documentation is not required but may be included.

(d) Appraising elements. Each performance element is appraised using one of the following element rating levels:

(1) Exceeds Fully Successful. Performance exceeds the performance standards established for the Meets Fully Successful level.

(2) Meets Fully Successful. Performance meets the performance standards established for the Fully Successful level.

(3) Does Not Meet Fully Successful. Performance falls below the performance standards established at the Meets Fully Successful level.

(e) Summary ratings. Once the elements are appraised, the summary rating is calculated using the "Decision Table" on Form AD-435 (see Exhibit C). Definitions of the five possible summary rating levels are as follows:

(1) "Unacceptable" - Performance which fails to meet established "Meets Fully Successful" performance standards in one or more critical elements of the employee's position. When performance is "Unacceptable", corrective action must be taken consistent with required procedures, e.g., OTI/PIP. Rating officials should seek guidance from the SHRO before rating any employee unacceptable.

(2) "Marginal" - Performance which needs improvement to achieve the "Meets Fully Successful" level. This may be evidenced by the need for close supervisory review, discussion and correction of work products. Does not require an issuance or establishment of a PIP/OTI.

(3) "Fully Successful" - Performance which is of good quality. This may be evidenced by a Fully Successful employee producing the expected quantity and/or quality of work and meets deadlines or schedules for completion of work.

(4) "Superior" - Performance of unusually good or excellent quality. This may be evidenced by a Superior employee producing a very high quality and/or quantity of work ahead of established schedules or deadlines and with less than normal supervision.

(5) "Outstanding" - Performance of rare, very high quality. Typically evidenced by an Outstanding employee producing an exceptional quality of work significantly ahead of established schedules or deadlines and with very little or no supervision. Performance for each element consistently exceeds the Fully Successful level.

(f) Weights. The weighting of critical and non-critical elements is built into the Decision Table through the use of appraisal units, and rating automatically occurs when the Decision Table is used to convert element ratings to the summary rating. Critical elements are assigned two appraisal units and non-critical elements are assigned one appraisal unit. See Exhibit C.

## § 2060.9 (Con.)

(g) Review procedures.

(1) A formal progress review must be held at the midpoint of the appraisal cycle. The purpose of a progress review is to advise employees of current performance. They are also used to ensure that critical and non-critical elements and performance standards are appropriate and current. Key points of the performance discussion should be documented on Form AD-435A. Employee must initial and date appropriate block on the Form AD-435A.

Ratings of record must be documented in writing and must be signed and reviewed by the rating and reviewing officials. Ratings may not be communicated to employees prior to approval by the final reviewer. This does not preclude discussions between supervisor and employee about performance prior to the determination of the rating of record. Supervisors should submit Forms AD-435, and AD-435A/B, to the reviewing official before discussing the rating with the employee.

(2) An employee's performance rating may be changed by the reviewing official; however

(i) Prior to any change, an attempt should be made to settle any differences between the rating and the reviewing official.

(ii) Changes made must be consistent with the performance standards and observable performance.

(h) Multiple appraisals. Multiple appraisals of performance made during the appraisal period must be combined or considered in deriving the employee's annual rating of record.

(1) Details and temporary promotions.

(i) Performance elements and standards shall be established for employees who are detailed or temporarily promoted to other positions in Rural Development or the Department. The supervisor responsible for the detail or temporary promotion, of 90 days or more, shall prepare elements and standards and communicate them in writing to the employee within 30 days of the start of the assignment. At the end of the assignment, a narrative document shall be prepared to document the employee's accomplishments and interim rating should be considered in deriving the employee's annual rating of record.

(ii) When details or temporary promotions are less than 90 days in duration, written performance elements and standards are not required, but some documented record of performance should be kept so feedback can be provided to the supervisor of record (or rating official) for use in deriving the annual rating of record.

(iii) When employees are detailed outside the Department, the employing agency must make a reasonable effort to obtain appraisal information from the outside organization.

(2) Change in supervisors. When an employee works under different supervisors during the appraisal period, including while on detail, each supervisor of 90 days or more shall prepare a narrative document/interim rating and forward it for appropriate consideration to the rating official who is rating the employee at the end of the rating cycle.

(3) Position changes. When an employee changes positions during the appraisal period of 90 days, and the employee has served for the minimum appraisal period in the position from which he/she has changed, a summary/interim rating shall be prepared.

(4) Transfer of rating. If an employee moves to a new agency, department or new organization at any time during the appraisal period, and the employee has been with Rural Development for a minimum rating period of 90 days, the current performance ratings of record must be transferred. A narrative statement (or interim rating) should be prepared which can be taken into consideration by the gaining agency or department when deriving the next rating of record.

(i) Inability to rate. When a rating of record cannot be prepared at the time specified by this plan, the appraisal period shall be extended for the amount of time necessary to meet the minimum appraisal period, at which time a rating of record shall be prepared. An appraisal period should not include evaluations of performance for more than 15 months or less than 90 days.

(j) Appraising disabled veterans. The performance appraisal and resulting rating of a disabled veteran may not be lowered because the veteran has been absent from work to seek medical treatment as provided in Executive Order 5396.

## § 2060.9 (Con.)

(k) Collateral Duties. Employees performing officially assigned collateral duties should be given performance plans, which reflect both their primary duties and responsibilities and the collateral duties. This is a joint responsibility of the primary supervisor of record and the collateral duty supervisor.

(l) Employee's certification. The supervisor shall review the rating of record with the employee once the reviewing official has approved/signed it. The employee's signature on the Form AD-435 shall serve as certification that such a discussion took place. If this discussion cannot be held, the supervisor shall document the reason on Form AD-435.

The employee's signature does not signify agreement with the rating, only that the rating was received by the employee. If an employee elects not to sign his/her rating, this should be noted in the signature block along with the date the appraisal was given.

§ 2060.10 Grievances.

(a) Non-Bargaining unit employees. The substance of the elements and standards of the performance plans cannot be grieved. However, the methods used to determine the Summary Rating and the Summary Rating itself can be grieved through the Administrative Grievance procedures.

(b) Bargaining unit employees. Issues involving performance ratings and performance plans shall be handled in accordance with the grievance procedures of the applicable negotiated agreement.

§ 2060.11 Linkage of Rating of Record to Other Personnel Actions.

Personnel decisions are made on the basis of merit with appropriate consideration of employee performance. All judgments about performance must be fair and equitable and may not be based upon non-merit factors such as sex, race, color, national origin, religion, personal favoritism, age, marital status, political affiliation, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, or other non-merit reasons.



(a) Within-Grade Increases (WGI). Employee may be granted a WGI when the employee's most recent rating of record is "Fully Successful" or better. The decision to grant or withhold a WGI is based upon the employee's performance within the appropriate waiting period. When a WGI decision is not consistent with the employee's most recent rating of record, a more current rating of record must be prepared (see RD Instruction 2054-A for further guidance). When a WGI decision is not consistent with the employee's most recent rating of record, the rating official should contact the SHRO to determine what further action is necessary.

(b) Promotions. Performance ratings shall be considered in evaluating employees for promotion and reassignment to positions with greater promotion potential. No employee shall receive a career ladder promotion unless his/her current rating of record is at least Fully Successful. Supervisors and employees should be aware, however, that a Fully Successful performance rating is not the only criteria for promotion.

(c) Training and Development. The performance appraisal process may be used as a basis for identifying training needs of employees. Non-critical performance elements are particularly useful for this purpose.

(d) Reduction-in-Force (RIF). Annual ratings of record are used to establish service credit and retention standing for RIF purposes. An employee will not be assigned a new rating of record for the sole purpose of affecting retention standing. To provide adequate time to properly determine an employee's retention standing prior to a RIF, a general or specific RIF notice will specify the date after which no new rating of record will be given that could be used to determine retention standing.

(1) Retention Standing. According to Departmental policy (as contained in Personnel Bulletin No. 351-1, Reduction in Force), the crediting of performance ratings issued on or after October 1, 1997, is subject to OPM regulations whether all the ratings within the competitive area were issued under a single rating pattern.

(2) Multiple ratings patterns. Ratings issued under multiple (or different) rating patterns. Where these ratings do not conform to a single rating pattern, the crediting plan in Personnel Bulletin No. 351-1, will be used to determine the years to be credited.

§ 2060.11(d) (Con.)

(3) Ratings within the same pattern. Where all ratings within the specified period and competitive area are in the same pattern, use the OPM provision for crediting in Personnel Bulletin No. 351-1.

(e) Quality Step Increase (QSI). A QSI may be granted to an employee who receives a rating of record at the outstanding level and who has not received a QSI within the preceding 52 consecutive calendar weeks.

(f) Performance bonuses. Performance ratings shall be used as a basis for performance bonuses. For performance bonuses, see RD Instruction 2063-B.

(g) Less than "Fully Successful" performance. Supervisors shall assist employees in improving less than "Fully Successful" performance. If performance is at the "Does Not Meet Fully Successful" level in one or more elements of the job the following should be done:

(1) Non-Critical element. The supervisor shall inform the employee as soon as the "Does Not Meet Fully Successful" performance is apparent and give a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate acceptable performance. The supervisor shall assist the employee by taking the following steps:

(i) Closer supervisory review of work.

(ii) Discussions and correction of work products.

(iii) Advise employee when the "Fully Successful" performance is met.

(2) Critical element. Supervisors shall assist employees in improving less than "Fully Successful" performance. If performance is at the "Does Not Meet Fully Successful" level in one or more critical elements of the job, the supervisor shall inform the employee as soon as the "Does Not Meet Fully Successful" performance is apparent and they must be notified in writing and given a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate acceptable performance. This should be accomplished through a PIP.

A PIP provides formal notice to the employee that performance is unacceptable and provides the employee opportunity to demonstrate acceptable performance. The PIP may include such activities as developmental assignments, structured employee assistance or counseling, formal training, on-the-job training and mentoring. Careful records must be kept of assistance offered and results achieved under the PIP. The supervisor should take the following steps:

- (i) Notification of the element or elements in which performance is unacceptable.
- (ii) Specific examples of the unacceptable performance.
- (iii) The performance requirements or standards which must be attained in order to demonstrate acceptable performance.
- (iv) A reasonable opportunity period to demonstrate acceptable performance on the elements at issue. This opportunity period will normally not be less than 30 days nor more than 90 days following the issuance of the warning letter and will be determined under the circumstances of the particular case.
- (v) Notice that the employee must improve to the acceptable level by the conclusion of the opportunity period and must sustain that level of performance for at least one year from the start of the opportunity period.

Should an employee's performance again become unacceptable in one or more of these critical elements, a performance-based adverse action or other alternative action may be proposed without the benefit of an additional opportunity to improve. Supervisors must contact their SHRO or employee relations office for guidance.

Administrative actions initiated against employees whose performance is "Unacceptable" under 5 U.S.C. 4303 and the Performance Management Plan or another program in existence prior to the effective date of this program shall continue to be processed consistent with that pre-established set of procedures and requirements.

2060.12 Program Evaluation.

Evaluation of overall organizational results, employee satisfaction, and consistency with mission objectives will promote the continued enhancement of a performance management program supportive of critical organizational results. Conducting ongoing evaluations of the performance management program will identify opportunities for improvement, and adjustments to the overall policy will be made as necessary.

(a) Instruction. All employees will receive a copy of this instruction. Supervisors and reviewing officials will receive training in carrying out their responsibilities under this plan.

(b) Periodic Evaluation. Periodic evaluations of the performance appraisal process will be made through a focus group and the Human Capital Survey to determine if improvements of the organizational performance management evaluation system are necessary. Key indicators of an effective performance management system include the following:

- (i) Individual performance expectations are aligned with organizational goals;
- (ii) Crosscutting organizational goals and objectives are achieved through collaboration, interaction and teamwork;
- (iii) Employees routinely use performance information to track achievement of goals and objectives;
- (iv) Employees are held accountable for making progress in bridging performance gaps;
- (v) Meaningful distinction are made regarding employee performance

Attachments: Exhibits A, B, C

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**QUICK REFERENCE  
FOR DEVELOPING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE PLANS  
THAT LINK TO ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS**

- Step 1**                    **Look at the overall picture.**  
Review organizational goals and objectives and performance measures already available. Determine which goals and measures the employee's work unit can affect.
- Step 2**                    **Determine what is going to be measured at the work unit level using any or all of the following methods:**
- Method A    (*Results-Oriented*)** Cascade the organization's mission or goals to the work unit level. Determine the work unit's accomplishment(s) that directly affect the organization's mission or goals.
- Method B    (*Results-Oriented*)** Determine the product(s) or service(s) (i.e., the accomplishments) that the work unit supplies or provides to its customers.
- Method C    (*Process-Oriented*)** Develop a process flow chart for the work unit. Establish key steps in the work process(es). These are the steps that should be measured.
- Step 3**                    **Develop performance elements that support work unit goals and mission or work processes.**  
Elements that address individual performance can be critical or non-critical. Any element addressing group performance must be non-critical. However, one way to ensure that those assignments and responsibilities are linked to the organization's mission and goals would be to derive elements from work unit results. The most important aspects of unit performance (results and/or processes) are identified in Step 2.
- Step 4**                    **Determine which performance elements should be critical elements and mark these on the performance plan.**  
There is a good possibility that the element should be critical if the element is a major component of the work, if serious consequences would result if the employee performed it unacceptably, if the element requires a significant amount of the employee's time, or if there is a statutory or regulatory requirement related to its performance.

**Step 5**

**Develop work unit and individual measures.**

For each element or work accomplishment, determine which general measure(s) (i.e., quantity, quality, timeliness, manner of performance, or cost-effectiveness) are important. If an accomplishment can be measured with numbers, determine the unit of measurement to be used. If performance can only be described (i.e., observed and verified), clarify who will appraise the work and what factors will be appraised.

**Step 6**

**Develop work unit and individual standards.**

A "Meets Fully Successful" standard must be established for each element. It should outline the performance requirement(s) or expectation(s) that must be met to be fully successful.

If the measure for the element is numeric, determine minimum number(s) that would represent successful performance. If the measure for the element is descriptive, determine what the rater would see or report that would verify that performance expectations for that element had been met or exceeds and below which a performance problem would exist.

If other work accomplishments or achievements are to be tracked and measured, it is recommended that employees be given a clear idea of the performance expectations to help them and their work units focus on what they are to do. Avoid absolute and backwards performance standards.

**Step 7**

**Determine how performance will be monitored.**

Determine what data to collect for each performance element, the source of the data, and whether all the data or just a sample should be collected. Determine when the data should be collected, who should collect it, and who should receive it. Review existing reports for possible use as feedback reports. Create feedback tables or graphs where appropriate, necessary, or desired. Try to design feedback processes that give employee's feedback automatically.

**Step 8**

**Check the performance plan to ensure that elements and standards are effective and meet regulatory requirements.**

Are the performance expectations quantifiable, observable, and/or verifiable? Does failure on the element mean that the employee's overall performance is unacceptable? Are the standards attainable and challenging and are expectations reasonable? Do they allow for some margin of error? Can the rater manage the data collected through the measurement process?

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These narrative statements describe the "Meets Fully Successful" level of performance. Applicable quantity, quality, and timeliness should be derived directly from the appropriate agency regulations, policies, instructions, work plans, etc. If no agency or regulatory guidelines exist, the rating official will provide further clarification. It is recommended that all generic elements be tailored to the position being evaluated.

**MANDATORY GENERIC CRITICAL PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS**

**Mandatory for all GS-13 and above supervisors<sup>1</sup> and managers**

**Supervision.** Work is assigned in a fair and effective manner. Technical guidance to subordinate staff is ordinarily provided in a timely manner. Performance management is implemented in accordance with procedure. Issues, concerns, or problems are handled promptly and fairly. To the extent possible, staff is properly trained and complies with occupational health and safety programs. Management decisions are supported and implemented within appropriate timeframes. Establishes and maintains effective management control systems to monitor activities, identify problem areas, initiate timely corrective action and monitor such actions until the problem is resolved.

**Mandatory for all GS-13 and above supervisors and managers**

**Resource Management.** Monitors allocated funds and maintains complete and accurate records of expenditures. Routinely utilizes resources in an efficient and effective manner. Ensures that funds, property and other resources are guarded against waste, loss, unauthorized use, and misappropriation.

<sup>1</sup> The General Schedule Supervisory Guide is used as reference to define the supervisory title. The Guide can be found at [www.opm.gov/fedclass/gssg.pdf](http://www.opm.gov/fedclass/gssg.pdf)



**Mandatory for all SES employees, Management Control Officers, State Directors, Program Directors, District Directors, Administrative Officers, and all GM employees.**

**Management Control Activities.** Management controls are in place and operating. Management control systems meet Office of Management and Budget, Government Accountability Office, Office of Personnel Management and USDA guidelines. Management controls reports are submitted at the required time and contain all required information. Corrective actions are taken to reduce or eliminate deficiencies leading to potential or actual loss of resources.

**Mandatory for supervisors and managers**

**Equal Opportunity & Civil Rights.** Performs all duties in a manner, which consistently demonstrates fairness, cooperation, and respect toward co-workers, office visitors, and all others in the performance of official business. Demonstrates an awareness of EO/CR policies and responsibilities of Agency and Departmental goals of valuing a diverse, yet unified workforce.

**Mandatory for all Rural Development Program Directors, except for Administrative Programs, and Rural Development Managers, where the State Director determines the performance standard and performance element are appropriate if the position has Marketing duties as a major portion of their work.**

**Marketing for Supervisors and Managers.** Provides leadership and guidance in the development and implementation of Rural Development's marketing program for the service area. Develops and maintains relationships with community officials, organizations, and individuals to assist in marketing Rural Developments programs and services.

**Mandatory for all Rural Development Program Directors, except for Administrative Programs, Area Directors, and Rural Development Managers, where the State Director determines the performance standard and performance element are appropriate if the position has Community Development duties as a major portion of their work.**

**Community Development for Supervisors and Managers.** Provides leadership in implementing the community development principles of the Rural Development mission area. Leads efforts to coordinate Rural Development programs at the local level and to ensure there is a cohesive system of service delivery to rural America.

**Mandatory for all non-rating officials**

Personal Contacts - EO/CR. Routinely displays courteous and tactful behavior towards internal and external customers, supervisors, co-workers, and/or team members. Projects a positive and professional image of USDA. Performs all duties in a manner which consistently demonstrates fairness, cooperation, and respect toward co-workers, office visitors, and all others in the performance of official business. Demonstrates an awareness of EO/CR policies and responsibilities of Agency and Departmental goals of valuing a diverse, yet unified workforce.

**Mandatory for all Rural Development Managers, Rural Development Specialists, and Area Directors, and with some modification, all other positions that have public contact as a major portion of their work**

Public Information Activities. Promotes and demonstrates a cooperative and courteous attitude in working with representatives of the business community, other Government agencies, other agricultural and private sector lenders, applicants, borrowers, and co-workers. Attends public meetings when appropriate to explain or discuss Agency local programs and policies. Utilizes news media to inform the public and potential applicants of available programs. Responds to adverse publicity in a manner, which improves public understanding of Agency programs and policies.

**Mandatory for all State, Area, and Local employees in localities where the State Director determines the performance standard and performance element are appropriate.**

Management of Inventory Property. Properties in inventory are managed to protect the interest of the Government and disposed of in an expeditious manner.

**Mandatory for all Rural Development Loan Specialist, and professionals, such as Engineers and Architects, where the State Director determines the performance standard and performance element are appropriate if the position has Marketing duties as a major portion of their work.**

Marketing for Non-supervisory Employees. Assists in the development and implementation of Rural Development's marketing program for the service area. Develops and maintains relationships with community officials, organizations, and individuals to assist in marketing Rural Development programs and services.

**Mandatory for all Rural Development Loan Specialist, and professionals, such as Engineers and Architects, where the State Director determines the performance standard and performance element are appropriate if the position has Community Development duties as a major portion of their work.**

Community Development for Non-rating Officials. Implements community development principles of the Rural Development mission area. Actively participates in efforts to coordinate Rural Development programs at the local level and to ensure there is a cohesive system of service delivery to rural America.

**NON-MANDATORY CRITICAL OR NON-CRITICAL GENERIC PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS.**

Execution of Duties. Completed work assignments are routinely performed in a timely manner, assuring a quality of work that meets the needs of the organization. Solutions developed demonstrate improvements in work methods. Work products do not require substantive revisions. Assignments are completed in accordance with applicable agency guidelines, including timeframes.

Communication. As a rule, oral and written communications are clear, correct, timely, and presented in an understandable manner. Supervisor and co-workers are informed of issues and problems when necessary. Information and guidance provided are timely and accurate.

Team Leadership. Routinely leads individuals and team members toward specific goals and accomplishments. Provides encouragement, guidance and direction as needed. Adjusts style to fit situation. Delegates appropriate authority in an effective manner. Coordinates functions of the team members. Demonstrates a sincere interest in employees' activities, abilities, etc.

Program Management. Manages program(s) resolving issues and problems within the employee's control. Monitors all aspects of program(s) for quality, effectiveness, and consistency. Program plans and guidance are responsive to objectives and requirements of the Agency. Policy instructions are appropriately issued and are accurate. Evaluates effectiveness of work and adjusts plans accordingly.

Special Projects. Special projects are regularly completed on time in a competent, accurate, and thorough manner. Completed projects comply with regulations and procedures. Special projects are completed independently, or reflect research and collaboration with others as required.

**Research and Analysis.** Thoroughly and accurately researches issues in a timely manner, using available reference sources (e.g. USDA manuals, or applicable law or regulations). Makes reasonable recommendations or decisions based on available guidance.

**Customer Service.** Provides advice that is timely, responsive, and accurate. Maintains appropriate rapport with internal and external customers. Develops and establishes working relationships with external organizations as required. Keeps supervisor and/or team leader informed of difficult and/or controversial issues and unique problems. Takes action to effectively solve problems before they have an adverse impact on the organization or other employees.

**Individual Contributions to the Team.** Ordinarily displays dependability and reliability. Promotes open communication. Contributes creative ideas and actively participates in team meetings resulting in added value to the team's products and services. When a problem arises, explores causes and assists in resolving them. Works with team members to appropriately implement decisions. Is usually open-minded to new ideas and resolving them. Willingly accepts and acts on constructive criticism.

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**Decision Tables - examples**

15 A Critical Element	15B Exceeds Fully Successful	15C Meets Fully Successful	15D Does Not Meet Fully Successful
X			2
X		2	
X		2	
			1
X		2	
15E Exceeds		15F Meets	15G Does Not Meet
0		6	3
15H Enter Total 15E + 15F + 15G = 15H 9			

Summary Rating

☐ Outstanding  
☐ Superior  
☐ Fully Successful  
☐ Marginal  
☒ Unacceptable

Decision Table (check off Summary Rating in block 16A)

Rating of Outstanding if 15E equals 15H.

Rating of Unacceptable if any critical element is rated in 15D.

Rating of Superior if no element is rated in 15D; 15F is greater than zero; and 15E is greater than 15F.

Rating of Marginal if 15G is greater than 15E, and no critical element is rated in 15D.

Rating of Fully Successful if none of the above applies.

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15 A Critical Element	15B Exceeds Fully Successful	15C Meets Fully Successful	15D Does Not Meet Fully Successful
X		2	
X		2	
X	2		
X		2	
		1	
	1		
		1	
15E Exceeds		15F Meets	15G Does Not Meet
3		8	0
15H Enter Total 15E + 15F + 15G = 15H 11			

Summary Rating

☐ Outstanding  
☐ Superior  
☒ Fully Successful  
☐ Marginal  
☐ Unacceptable

**Decision Table**

SUMMARY RATING LEVELS	
UNACCEPTABLE	One or more critical elements are appraised at "DOES NOT MEET FULLY SUCCESSFUL"
MARGINAL	More appraisal units are at "Does NOT MEET FULLY SUCCESSFUL" than at "EXCEEDS FULLY SUCCESSFUL". No critical element can be at "DOES NOT MEET FULLY SUCCESSFUL".
FULLY SUCCESSFUL	More appraisal units are at "MEETS FULLY SUCCESSFUL" than "EXCEEDS FULLY SUCCESSFUL" and no critical elements are at "DOES NOT MEET FULLY SUCCESSFUL".
SUPERIOR	More appraisal units are at "EXCEEDS FULLY SUCCESSFUL" than at "MEETS FULLY SUCCESSFUL" but none are below "MEETS FULLY SUCCESSFUL"
OUTSTANDING	All appraisal units are at "EXCEEDS FULLY SUCCESSFUL"

Critical element = 2 appraisal units  
Noncritical element = 1 appraisal unit

**Instructions:**

1. If any critical element is appraised at the "DOES NOT MEET FULLY SUCCESSFUL" level, this is an "UNACCEPTABLE" rating.
2. If all elements are appraised at "EXCEEDS FULLY SUCCESSFUL" this is an "OUTSTANDING" rating.
3. If neither of these conditions are met, compare the appraisal values at each of the three element rating levels to the appraisal unit combinations listed in the Decision Table and assign the proper rating.